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BRABANT INTERIOR
BY S. J. BLOMMERS
TO BE SHOWN AT SAINT LOUIS EXPOSITION

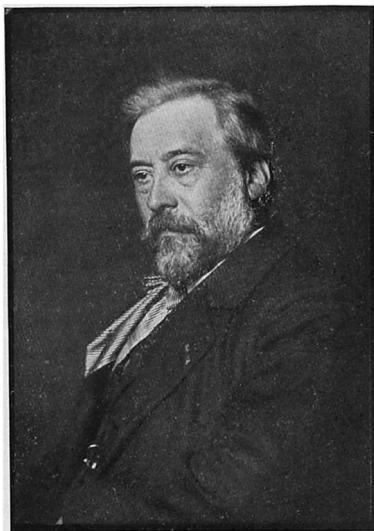


THE ART OF B. J. BLOMMERS

I will doubtless not incur the charge of speaking with prejudice, faulty judgment, or undue eulogy if I say unqualifiedly that the modern Dutch school of painting is the simplest, strongest, sincerest, and most vital school of art existing at the present day. It does not run riot in glaring color; it does not ransack the universe for novelties; it does not strain after the picturesque and striking; it does not cultivate *chic* or brilliancy; it does not venture upon license, either of subject or treatment: but it is wholesome, clean, pure; it is imbued with the poetry of common life and commonplace scenes; it is rich with the glorious color harmonies that the men of to-day learned from their immortal ancestors; it is the true expression of life and nature.

In a word, the art of present-day Holland, in its simplicity, its honesty, and its directness, is part and parcel of the people and the country, and any consideration of modern Dutch art in general, or of the work of any one artist in particular, would be singularly faulty did it not lay adequate stress upon the history and character of the people and upon their environment and their struggles. In the stirring incidents of the history of Holland one finds displayed all the virtues that go to the making of a great nation—and the virtues that make a great nation will make a great art. Endurance, foresight, strength of will, patience, courage, the spirit no defeat can daunt, the love of learning, and above all, the appreciation of simple beauty—these are traits of the Dutch as a nation, and they are all reflected in their national art.

The Hollanders were early educated into the practice of patience and determination, through a stern conflict with the sea. No generous soil, no unvarying sunshine, rendered life for them easy and luxurious. They had to win and they now are obliged to hold against



B. J. BLOMMERS
From a Photograph



WILLEM, THE ARTIST'S SON
By B. J. Blommers

the ocean the very earth on which they tread. They found swamps almost uninhabitable, and by their incessant toil they covered them with green pastures and thriving marts of trade. Literally they brought order out of chaos. Where once rolled a wild waste of water, or where once the pathway led through slimy morasses, snug homesteads arose through their industry and determined effort, sleek cattle browsed by the banks of trim canals, and magnificent emporiums of commerce attracted the trade of the world. As Motley eloquently says of the Dutch, they found a re-

gion outcast of ocean and earth and wrested at last from both domains their richest treasures—an achievement of which they may well be proud.

The repellent waste of centuries ago is to-day one of the choicest garden spots of Europe. The transformation has meant toil, self-denial, suffering; in a word, the exercise of all that heroism, intelligence, and industry which an inhospitable country tends to stimulate and develop, and a clime more favored of fortune tends to deaden. Had the Hollanders enjoyed



SHELL FISHERS OF KATWYK
By B. J. Blommers

Latin skies, had they been lapped in luxury instead of being forced to struggle with nature, had their home enjoyed the advantages of southern Europe, their art to-day would not have the sterling qualities that characterize it, but would likely savor of the decadence that marks the art of present Italy and Spain, and the banality of much of France's product, which annually crowds the famous salons of Paris.



B. J. BLOMMERS'S STUDIO
From a Photograph

And as for England—well, the English may sneer at the “mechanic” Dutch and their half-drowned land; but it was in their fight with nature that the Dutch acquired the qualities that bore them through the blood and fire and agony of the war of independence, that made their commerce far-reaching, and above all, their art splendid—in comparison with which English art is vapid and soulless.

As a matter of fact, the art a nation produces, the art an individual man produces, is not one of those accidents of which we can neither distinguish the cause nor foresee the effects, it is the direct outcome of character and disposition, and is the reflection of the surroundings in which it develops itself. There is not a single exception to this rule. All art that has endured, all art that is worthy of the

name, proves it, be it the art of Raphael or the art of Rembrandt. The matchless creations of Rembrandt's genius claims for all time the reverent admiration of the world, and behind his wonderful canvases and his no less wonderful etchings one sees the national life of the Dutch. His works—and the same is true of the present-day Dutch artists—are the result and the expression of the sorrows the people



GOING TO MARKET

By B. J. Blommers

have borne, of the triumphs they have gained, of the industry that has become a national trait, of the simplicity and frugality that have been inculcated until they are literally ingrained.

Thus the art of Holland, from its first beginnings to its twentieth-century triumphs, has been peculiarly characteristic of the place of its birth. No other country could have produced it. From the black hours of the war of independence, the land has passed into the light of freedom and peace. With the growth of wealth came the encouragement of art, and as might naturally be expected, that art was a strong and manly art.

The painters at the outset sat down before nature and painted what they saw, and at the present day the artists follow exactly the

same practice. As a consequence, their works have in unrivaled measure the impress of truth and reality. Rembrandt, the greatest of them all, studied with incessant assiduity the common people with whom he was brought in contact, and went to nature as a reverent seeker for truth. The men and women who are making the art of Holland to-day have never sought to improve on Rembrandt's methods—they, too, go to nature for their inspiration. And as Wordsworth says "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her." They are content with their own land, their own people, their own cus-

toms, habits, traits; they paint what they know and as they know it; and naturally they paint it vividly and grandly—an unsurpassed art.

Bernardus Johannes Blommers is no exception among his nation's artists. He is of the rank and file. He has all his people's simplicity

and strength, their love of homely scenes, their delight in unpicturesque seascape and landscape, their scorn of mere show and brilliancy, their capacity for enjoying the subtle charm of people and scenes which to many would be devoid of interest. In short, like every other great



PIERRE, THE ARTIST'S SON
By B. J. Blommers



VILLAGE VIEW
By B. J. Blommers

painter Holland has produced, he is a true son of his own country, he has inherited his people's qualities and instincts, and he has been wise enough to develop his art in conformity with the national character. Hence he is a worthy descendant of Rembrandt and Hals, and an equally worthy associate of Weissenbruch, Israëls, the Marises, Mesdag, and the other men whose genius has reflected glory



BRABANT INTERIOR

By B. J. Blommers

upon the nation, and whose virile art is in demand by the public. Holland has produced men of wider fame, but few of greater merit.

Blommers was born in Scheveningen, not far from The Hague, and right among the sand dunes that border the North Sea. That little village was once almost exclusively the home of fisher folk, but now, it is to be regretted, it has developed into a popular watering-place. In Blommers's younger days, however, Scheveningen retained its Old World ways and its quiet simplicity of manners. The madding crowd had not found it and made it fashionable and vulgar. The boy grew up among people after his own heart, whom he loved for their

humbleness, whose manners and habits he contracted, and from whom his subsequent years of fame and fortune have never estranged him.

His father was a lithographer, and it was his ambition that his son should follow the same business. From his father young Blommers doubtless inherited his artistic sympathies and instincts. For the business, however, he had no predilection, and he welcomed the kindly



INTERIOR NORTH BRABANT
By B. J. Blommers

intervention of his friend, one of the Maris brothers, who finally, by prevailing upon the elder Blommers, made it possible for the boy to adopt painting as his life work. He was sent to the Academy at The Hague, and on the completion of his art studies he settled in the place of his birth. At Scheveningen he found his true location, as in art he found his true vocation. He became heart and soul the painter of the things and people around him. Conventionality, tradition, false sentiment, were foreign to his character. He was never led by misguided ambition to undertake to paint what was foreign to his

daily experience. This was doubtless not a matter of theory nor of studious regard for personal limitations. It was primarily a matter of love of the scenes and the people that had been endeared to him from childhood. He found his inspiration in that which was nearest at hand and most familiar, he resolved to be true, sincere, and natural in his art, and throughout his career he has remained loyal to this wholesome resolution.

Scheveningen is not a beautiful place, nor are its inhabitants people likely to have a deep interest for the multitude. But Blommers saw beauty, pathos, heroism in the lot of the fishermen, he saw a charm in the cottages with their homely but cheery interiors, he saw the quiet glory of nature in the ocean and the sand dunes that flanked it; and by virtue of his poetic insight and of the technical ability he acquired as a draftsman and as a rich, harmonious, but subdued, colorist, he has made pictures that will live out of material that others would have thought so unpromising as not to be fitted for pictorial treatment.

He paints what he sees and feels and sympathizes with; and because he himself is moved and influenced by what he paints, he moves the world to emotions in keeping with his own—fishermen bidding their wives and children good by upon the strand on setting forth on their precarious calling, women sorting the catch on the beach preparatory for an auction, mothers and their babes in homes that would seem squalid but for the sense of comfort and content with which the artist has invested them, children at play gathering shells on the sands or sailing their mimic craft in the surf, men toiling for bread, but doing so with manifest cheerfulness and pride and without the telltale impress of poverty that is so often apparent in the figures of his great contemporary, Israëls, glimpses of the sea and of the strand and of odd nooks and corners farther inland. From scenes and people such as these he drew his inspiration and developed his artistic power. The fisherfolk and their simple ways did not create Blommers's artistic instincts, but with their healthy influence they called these artistic instincts into action and gave them outlet and vitality.

No one perhaps deplores more than Blommers the transformation that has been wrought at Scheveningen. During many years of his career the little town preserved its pristine simplicity, and the people their former manners and habits. But through the enterprise of the desecrators city life came to the hamlet as a sort of canker, and of late years Blommers has taken trips to Hesse, to North Brabant, and to other places less subjected to civic influences, where he could find homes and people more in keeping with those with which he was familiar in his boyhood. It is in North Brabant that most of his well-known and ever-prized interiors have of late years been taken.

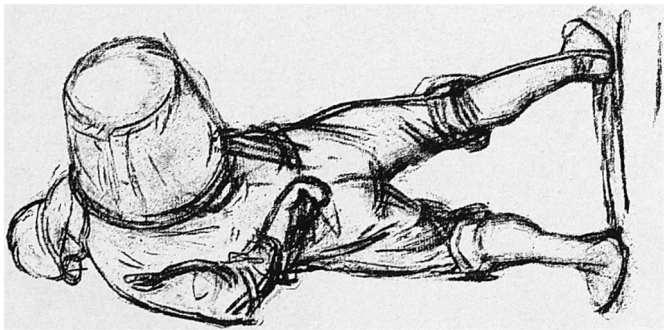
Blommers has been singularly fortunate in winning for himself

both patronage and honors. To-day he is one of the most honored in his own country of the modern Dutch painters, and yet, strange to say, it was in America that he was accorded his first recognition. Fully twenty years ago his works were introduced into this country by a prominent art dealer, and the appreciation of them shown by the public really gave the artist a start on his very successful career. It is his recognition of this fact more than anything else which impels Blommers to come to America the coming year with his entire family and visit the St. Louis Exposition, at which he will exhibit two or three of his choicest paintings.

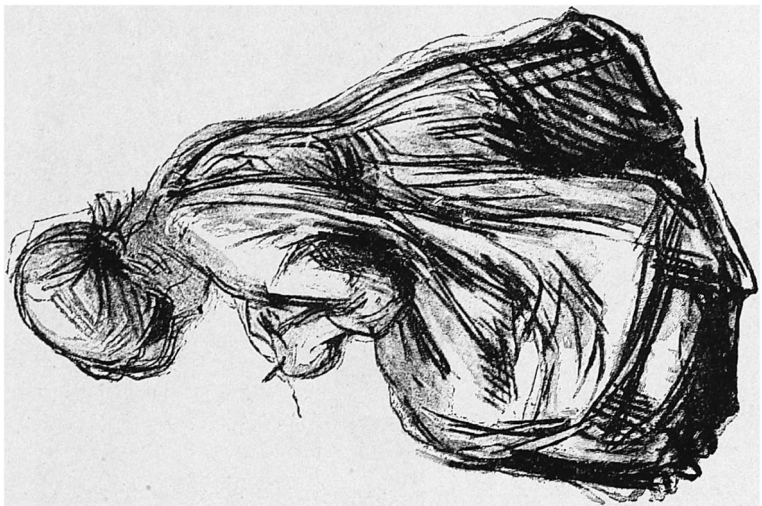
When public favor came, however, his rise was rapid. His work is now represented in all the principal museums of Holland, and in many of the public and private galleries in other countries. He has won gold medals at The Hague, Amsterdam, Munich, Brussels, and Paris in 1900, and honorable diplomas at Antwerp, Amsterdam, Chicago, and Brussels. He has also received the decorations of Chevalier of the Order of St. Michael of Bavaria, Leopold of Belgium, and the Nederlandsche Leeuw. More prized perhaps than any of the honors that have been conferred upon him is a "festival," arranged by his fellow-artists of Holland, and covering several days. This was designed as a tribute to his genius and was participated in by all the painters of the country. As a souvenir of the occasion the artists presented Blommers with a portfolio of water-colors, each contributing a specimen of his own work as a sort of personal memento. This portfolio is one of the artist's choicest treasures, and is displayed by him with pride, not



STUDY IN CHARCOAL
By B. J. Blommers



STUDY IN CHARCOAL
By B. J. Blommers



STUDY IN CHARCOAL
By B. J. Blommers



PEN DRAWING
By B. J. Blommers

merely as the witness of a special honor to himself, but as an evidence of the artistic achievements of his numerous appreciative brother artists.

By many it is thought Blommers's "Departure of the Herring Boats at Scheveningen" is the picture by which his reputation will be best sustained. It represents a group of fishermen taking farewell of their wives and children before sailing. It is full of feeling, and instinctively one falls under the sway of the human interest of the story it tells. Indeed, all of Blommers's paintings tell a story. They are not of the *genre* type of work—the story is not the uppermost thing in the artist's mind. But the artist invariably feels deeply, and he has the faculty of throwing his feeling into his canvases in such a way that the spectator is impelled to build upon the suggestions of his lines and colors, and fill in the details of some story of reverence, or delight, or pathos, of which the canvas is but an exponent.

It should be said in passing that Blommers is by common acceptance one of the finest figure painters in Holland. Some of his most famous paintings are "The Doll," "The Berry Pickers," "Taking Care of Baby," "Going to Market," "Knitting," "Sister's Care," and "The Young Mother." His canvases, however, are legion

in number, covering, as I have said, every imaginable scene in and near the haunts he loves, every kind of occupation to which the people are given, and every type of character the district affords. Cottage interiors are a specialty that has made him famous, though his portrayals of child life are scarcely less known and prized.

One peculiarity of his work should be emphasized, since it distinguishes him sharply from many another limner of peasant types. Millet, the great French painter of peasant life, was prone to emphasize the harsh, the repellent, the sordid side of lowly life. His can-



PORTRAIT OF MME. BLOMMERS
By B. J. Blommers

vases have about them the odor of sweat and the sense of suffering. Israëls, one of the Nestors of the modern Dutch school, is scarcely less given to laying stress upon the sorrowful side of life. Blommers's characters, on the contrary, are the same sort of people, subjected to the same sort of drudgery, harassed, doubtless, by the same wants, and scourged by the same sufferings, but Blommers is a happy-spirited optimist, prone to dwell upon the bright side of life and to recognize the fact that the lowly life of the toiler is not neces-



THE MIDDAY MEAL
By B. J. Blommers

sarily a life of discontent or sorrow. Consequently, his characteristic work shows his peasant and fisherfolk as people of humbleness and happiness, not of sordidness and sorrow, as people, one might imagine, who would not exchange their humble station, with its simple joys, its deep family affection, its quiet pleasures, for all the glitter and tinsel and excitement of those who enjoy wealth and social preferment.

His pictures are thus all imbued with the spirit of optimism, content, and happiness—the happy, heedless frolics of childhood, maternal care, sisterly and brotherly devotion, the pleasures of quiet repasts, the tenderness of heartfelt farewells; in a word, wholesome, humble life into which wealth and fashion, with their attendant train of follies, have never found *entrée*. Indeed, Blommers has a theory that every scene has its beauty, and if we fail to see it, it is the fault, not of the

spectacle, but of the spectator. It is this theory that has dominated all the achievements of his long and very successful artistic career.

"Coloration and atmospheric effect," he once said, in discussing his art theories, "are not the first considerations in the producing of a picture. A picture can be beautiful and perfect without any color whatever, in black and white, or monochrome. The chief and first thought must be the balance, a true and perfect balance of light and shade. Examine a masterpiece by some great painter. Everything is perfectly balanced. He has known exactly how and where to place each stroke of his brush, light and shade are weighed and not found wanting. The picture is correct in every particular, and if one does not see its beauty and power it is the *spectator* that is at fault, and not the *spectacle*. It is surprising how differently each man sees the same object."

This, of course, is a truism of the painter's art, and needs no elaboration. It is a truism, however, which we are apt to forget. Blommers sees with the eyes of a natural-born interpreter of life and nature, and if his canvases have a greater content of truth, beauty, sentiment, and reverence than those of some other artists, it is simply because he, whether by nature or training it matters not, has viewed his scenes as a divining spectator. The scene is transformed and exalted by the sheer penetration of the man who sees it and who records simply, directly, and forcefully all that he sees.

I cannot better close this little appreciation than by quoting the words of a discerning friend and admirer. "Blommers holds a prominent place among our modern artists," says A. G. C. Van Duyl. "He is a man with a receptive nature who trusts to the impressions of his own eye and is not carried away by any inventive ability. He puts his whole soul into his work, and views careful study as a necessary evil, imparting, as it does, artistic knowledge, enabling its possessor to work thereafter with a confidence obtainable in no other way. To this may be traced the freedom and power of his method, equally apparent in his oil-paintings as in his water-colors. The choice of material seems to be of little moment to him. Whatever he produces, we see before us a charming picture not only as regards the subject, but as regards the work. His touch is sympathetic and light, yet broad and firm. He works with confidence, there is no hesitation, no uncertain lines. His productions show that his brush is handled by a man of exceptional talent and with a rare knowledge and a keen appreciation of nature." *

MRS. CHARLES P. GRUPPÉ.

* For other examples of Blommers's work see following pages.

RADICAL ERROR IN ART EDUCATION

It is a singular fact that whenever the teaching of art comes under discussion the debaters almost invariably devote their time entirely to the question of teaching, leaving art to take care of itself. Recently a department of art education met in Boston to consider this topic, and while several opinions were expressed on the best method of study, no one thought of dealing seriously with the question of what art is. Art, in a word, was left to take care of itself.

It is true that Dr. Denman Ross, of Harvard University, hinted



THE YOUNG MOTHER
By B. J. Blommers

at the matter when he said, speaking of the work of art in general: "The motive of it may be good or bad; the performance good or bad. We may have the fine performance of a bad motive, the bad performance of a good one. Is it useful, right, true? Those are questions of science or philosophy.

Is it well done? That is the question of art." But is it the question? That, it seems to us, is the question which "teachers of art" are bound to consider, and the question which, of all others, they most studiously avoid.

The agitation in favor of art education, which has of late become so strong, seems invariably to turn about the question of teaching the student to paint or teaching him to draw. It does not seem ever to occur to the agitators to consider for a moment the question of what drawing and painting mean, their sole endeavor being to encourage the practice of drawing and painting in schools. It is strange to see how near they get to the real difficulty without actually recognizing it.

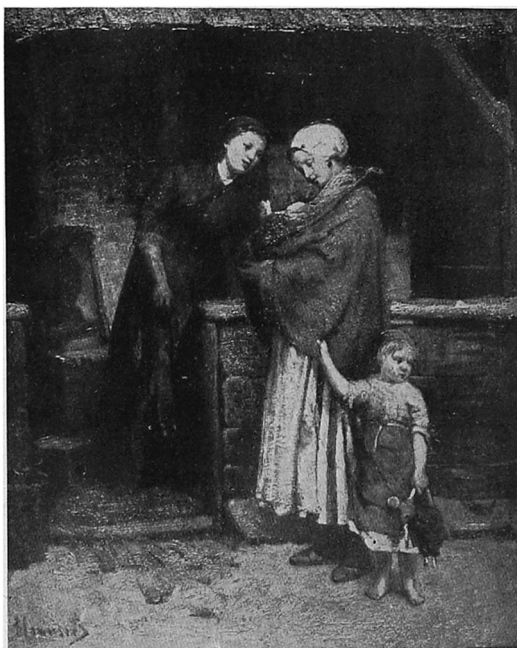
Thus, one of the speakers in Boston, dealing with improved modes

of teaching, observed that, "the most radical change in method was, perhaps, when we attempted to substitute for exact representation less accurate but more artistic representation, which experience has shown to be sometimes a cover for imperfect instruction by ignorant teachers." It is horrible to think of these "more artistic" performances, but this gives us a clew to the common defect that we are conscious of in the generality of current art education, namely, the belief that painting and drawing are tricks to be taught to as many as are willing to learn them.

The singular thing about this illusion is, that we find no similar illusion in regard to writing, a far simpler and commoner mode of expression. The history of literature is taught, and as a matter of course, writing, grammar, and other things that help a man to express himself through the ordinary channels, but these things are never thought of as a part of "art education."

Yet painting, which, with the exception of sculpture and architecture, is the art least understood and least cared for by the average man, is now held up as a proper thing for every one to learn in the schools; an art which, as Michael Angelo said, "can only be apprehended by the intellect, and that with great difficulty."

Without involving any attempt to instill into the mind of the pupil a notion of the meaning of art, the current methods of instruction are all planned on the supposal of production; that is to say, the pupil is trained as a producer, not as a consumer, though it is manifest that the majority are predestined to belong to the latter class. S.



THE YOUNG MOTHER
By B. J. Blommers



ON THE STRAND
By B. J. Blommers

ART NEWS FROM THE OLD WORLD

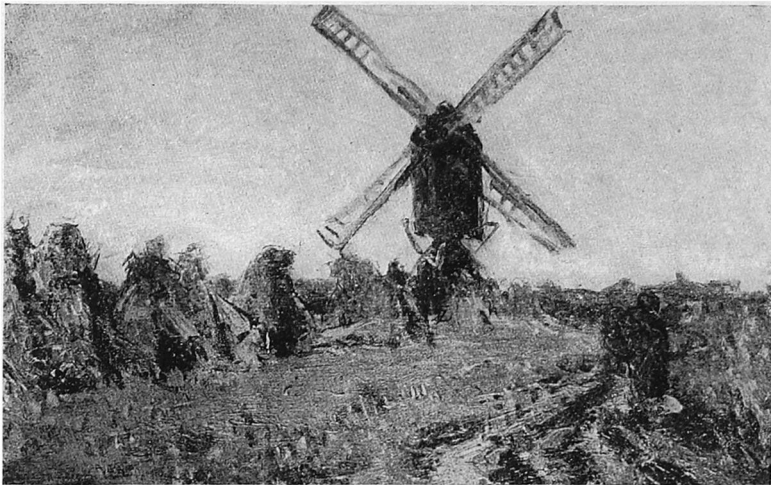
✿ The sales of Academy pictures during the exhibition at Burlington House show a great improvement over those of last year when the war and the coronation of the king combined to reduce the aggregate sales to £10,456. This year the total realized was £20,177, the highest since 1899. This sum does not include pictures and portraits painted on commission or disposed of privately. It includes only pictures marked for sale on the catalogue and sold on private view. Such sales number 115, including seven oil-paintings, three miniatures, eighteen in black-and-white, and ten pieces of sculpture. Among the biggest prices for oils was that paid for Napier Hemy's sea-piece "Youth," which brought £1,280, the highest priced canvas sold. Anesby Brown's "Coming Day" sold for £630; Sir Ernest Waterlow's "Warkworth Castle," £800; La Thangue's "Mowing Bracken," £600; Violet's "Provence," £600; C. E. Perugini's "Silver Tresses," £500; his "Faith," £400; Blair Leighton's "Alain Chartier," £600; and David Murray's "Country of Constable," £630.

✿ England is doing what she can to afford young people some of the advantages offered them in Germany in the way of arts and crafts. The County Council of London manages a Central School of Arts and Crafts in Regent Street under Professor W. R. Lethaby, a writer on the applied arts, whose books are well known in the United States. He has seven hundred and fifty students under him, many of whom are

apprentices and journeymen in various trades. The class in book-binding shows work of a high grade, and certain pupils exhibit fine cabinet work with carvings and enamels. Another branch well represented is silversmithing, and there are scattered exhibits of brass and copper work, illuminated manuscripts, and embroidery. At this school manufacturers find workmen and workwomen who show talent, and their employees continue to study at the night schools, perfecting themselves in drawing and modeling and having the advantage of the criticism and advice of the teachers. The school was founded in 1896. Last year there were 1,008 entries. It has outgrown its present accommodations, and a permanent building is now planned for a site allotted by the County Council on Southampton Row.

✱ Mezzotints after the British portraitists keep to the high figures noted during recent years. The engraving of Romney's "Hon. Mrs. Beresford," by J. Jones, in the first state with full margins and before inscription, went, at a recent sale, for \$1,300; the same painter's "Henrietta, Countess of Warwick," by J. R. Smith, first state, with uncut margins, brought \$1,400, and two examples of Hoffner's "Mrs. Michael Angelo Taylor as Miranda," by W. Ward, brought \$1,500 each. The latter is a full-length portrait. At the same sale Durer's "Melencolia" went for \$350, his "Knight and Death" for \$340, and Rembrandt's "John Leitma" for \$575.

✱ M. Carriere's masterpiece, "The Dead Christ," has at last found a place in the Luxembourg Museum. French artists and critics long



WINDMILL IN NORTH BRABANT
By B. J. Blommers

ago appealed to the government to secure this beautiful work, but only seven thousand francs was voted for the purpose. As the price demanded was five times this amount, and no rich amateur volunteered to complete the sum, several artists started a subscription list. The deficit has just been met and the picture purchased.

✱ According to an English authority the youth of Britain who has a liking for art has a choice of two hundred and fifty schools and sixteen hundred art classes conducted at the expense of the state. His next step is the Royal College of Art at South Kensington, which is also under the Board of Education. Art teachers are formed here, but other students can enter on payment of sixty-five dollars a term if they pass the tests. There is the state school in London at University College. The Royal Academy schools have a five-year course. The last report of the examiners at the Victoria and Albert Museum (South Kensington) shows that 5,722 works were entered for competition out of 41,510 sent up to London for examination. Birmingham took seventy-four prizes, of which nineteen are for jewelry and metal work. The report takes a shot at a modern fashion by the remark: "We regret to notice the pernicious influence in some of the designs of that modern phase of work which has been called L'Art Nouveau." The rebuke has struck very close home, for the Victoria and Albert



THE WORKSHOP
By B. J. Blommers



REST ON THE BEACH

By B. J. Blommers

Courtesy of W. Scott Thurber

Museum has been acquiring of late a good many specimens of the modern art to which the examiners attribute a "pernicious influence."

✿ Some English architects have begun a discussion as to the possibility and wisdom of allowing architects to "sign" the buildings they design by means of some tablet affixed to the structure. Painters sign their pictures. Why should not architects who make pictures in brick and stone, often far more durable than those upon canvas, be allowed to do so? Objections are made upon the ground that such tablets might be considered as contrary to the etiquette of a profession which deprecates self-advertisement. But the painter's signature might be considered an advertisement to the effect that any one liking certain pictures may get more of the same kind by applying to the signer. In some French and German cities the municipal authorities award a certain number of prizes every year to the architects and builders of successful houses, placing a small tablet announcing the award upon the structure. In Paris the owner of a building so distinguished is exempted from certain taxes for three years. The architects of important public buildings are likely to be fairly well known in the community, but it is sometimes difficult to discover the names of the designers of effective business structures and dwellings.



KNITTING
By B. J. Blommers



"DE POP"
By B. J. Blommers

To the lay mind there does not seem to be any valid objection to such a scheme as that proposed, and its possible benefits may be great.

✱ A member of the association which is managing the autumn salon recently said: "Our great desire is to establish the society on a truly democratic basis, leaving the least possible room for coteries and their injustice. The rules will be drawn up in such a way as to prevent the formation of cliques, which corner all the advantages and honors and bar the way to young talent. The committee will be selected by lot from among the members of the society, which, in addition to painters, will include well-known collectors and art critics. We are of opinion that such critics who have supported the movements of the advance guard and patrons of art who serve its cause by their moral and pecuniary support, should have a place on the jury."

✱ Art dealers, and those who exhibit galleries of pic-

tures, will learn with surprise that according to British law the placing of a label "Sold" on a picture renders the proprietor of the gallery or the manager of the exhibition liable for the price at which the artist has agreed to sell it. G. C. Haite, of London, had a picture in a gallery which attracted the notice of a buyer. He began negotiations for its purchase, but before terms were arranged the dealer placed "Sold" on the picture. Eventually, however, the buyer withdrew his offer.



SISTER'S CARE
By B. J. Blommer